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**Kenny, AQUINAS**

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*Aquinas* (Past Masters Series), by **Anthony Kenny**. New York: Hill and Wang, 1980. Pp. viii + 86. Paper \$3.95.

Reviewed by NORMAN KRETZMANN, Cornell University.

Anyone who accepts an invitation to write a book of eighty small pages on an author as voluminous and systematic as Aquinas is committed to doing something drastic: a broad survey or detailed discussions of only a few selected topics. Kenny's way of handling this difficult assignment involves a generally successful combination of those drastic measures. "The book is divided into three chapters. The first is an account of St Thomas's life and works and an assessment of his significance for contemporary philosophy. The second is a sketch of the major concepts of Aquinas's metaphysical system: it includes a discussion of the doctrine of Being, which is one of the most famous, but also the most overrated, elements in his philosophy. The third chapter is devoted to Aquinas's philosophy of mind, which is less well known but far more rewarding to study" (Preface).

Kenny is almost apologetic about his first chapter, describing it as "very heavily dependent" on Weisheipl's *Friar Thomas d'Aquino* (Bibliographical Note) and as "of necessity extremely sketchy and impressionistic" (p.30). But the subjective touches that make this evaluative survey impressionistic are also what make it particularly insightful and enjoyable. Everyone who has studied Aquinas will find something or other to question or quarrel with in Chapter One, but for ordinary secular students of philosophy, I don't believe there is a better brief introduction (31 pp.) to Aquinas's life and works, to his philosophical setting and his philosophical significance. Its admitted sketchiness does lead to a few pedagogical lapses, as when Kenny reports that "In Aquinas's technical terminology, when we talk of God's goodness, or his wisdom, or his love, we are using words not univocally, or equivocally, but *analogically*," leaving all those technical terms unexplained (p.9). A dictionary will do for the first two but is likely to be misleading regarding the crucial term 'analogically.' Fortunately, Kenny's own clear philosophical style survives its encounter with Aquinas's scholastic terminology. He not only avoids the jargon characteristic of too many writers on Aquinas but also introduces some happy innovations, such as 'idea' for *species intelligibilis* (p.69) and 'receptive intellect' for *intellectus possibilis* (inadvertently also called 'potential intellect' at one point) (p.18).

Although Aquinas's theology receives a fair amount of attention in the initial survey chapter, it is not among the topics Kenny takes up in the more detailed discussions of Chapters Two and Three (as can be seen from his summary, quoted above). Readers who know very little about Aquinas—the readers for whom a volume on him in the Past Masters series appears to be designed—are likely to be disappointed to find so little on his work in the field he is most clearly associated with, and more than one reviewer has complained of this

feature of the book, remarking, for instance, that "it treats Aquinas's theology as if it were merely an incidental shell from which a valuable kernel of philosophical erudition can be extracted" (David Caute, *New Statesman* 4 April 1980). It is unfair to suggest in this way that Kenny's attitude towards Aquinas's theology is dismissive, however; he pretty clearly has other reasons for giving theology short shrift here.

He might be taken to be offering such a reason in the opening sentence of his Preface: "This is a book about Thomas Aquinas as a philosopher: it is written for readers who may not necessarily share his theological interests and beliefs." But that, I think, is not his reason. Omitting the theology in order to accommodate the non-Christian reader of the Aquinas volume in this series would be as inappropriate as omitting the social and economic theory from the volume on Marx "for readers who may not necessarily share his . . . interests and beliefs."

Kenny's real reasons for his de-emphasis of theology as well as for his choice and his treatment of the philosophical topics taken up in Chapters Two and Three are most nearly explicit, I think, in this passage: "Aquinas is little read nowadays by professional philosophers: he has received much less attention in philosophy departments, whether in the continental tradition or in the Anglo-American one, than lesser thinkers such as Berkeley or Hegel. He has, of course, been extensively studied in theological colleges and in the philosophy courses of ecclesiastical institutions; but ecclesiastical endorsement has itself damaged Aquinas's reputation with secular philosophers, who have tended to discount him as simply a propagandist for Catholicism. Moreover, the official respect accorded to Aquinas by the Church has meant that his opinions and arguments have frequently been presented in crude ways by admirers who failed to appreciate his philosophical sophistication. But since the Second Vatican Council Aquinas seems to have lost something of the pre-eminent favour he enjoyed in ecclesiastical circles, and to have been superseded, in the reading-lists of ordinands, by fashionable authors judged more relevant to the contemporary scene. This wind of ecclesiastical change may blow no harm to his reputation in secular circles" (pp. 27-28). The truth is that, with a small but growing number of other philosophers outside Catholicism, Kenny is on an expedition to salvage Aquinas; and it is astonishing to watch the rich prize being abandoned by some of its crew without a fight, as in these concluding sentences by a Catholic reviewer: "No Catholic intellectual who was not an idiot would disparage Aquinas, or for that matter under-estimate the Master of Balliol's interpretation of him. But today the intellectual case for Catholicism and indeed for Christianity lies elsewhere" (Frank Longford, *Books and Bookmen* 25, April 1980). In this book Kenny himself is not concerned with the intellectual case for Christianity, but philosophers who do have that concern may be glad to retrieve and give new use to what strikes some of us as still the richest single source for rational theology.

Kenny's immediate concern is rather to draw out some of Aquinas's "philosophical insights which entitle him to be considered as one of the world's great philosophers" (Preface); and to do that most effectively against the background sketched in the long passage quoted above, he understandably focuses on topics that have no obvious connection with theology. (He has special warrant for restricting a short, general book in this drastic way just because several respectable treatments of Aquinas as a philosopher *and* a theologian are available—e.g., Gilson's and Copleston's.) His third chapter, on Aquinas's philosophy of mind, serves his ostensible purpose admirably. In it he argues that "the writings of Aquinas on the topics nowadays treated by philosophers of mind remain of value" (p. 61), presenting a philosophically stimulating and attractive account that is laudatory without being uncritical. Some parts of the theory Kenny finds "obscure in detail and probably confused" or "in some respects naive and unsatisfactory" (pp. 75 & 78); on the other hand, he picks out "Aquinas's doctrine of the intentional existence of forms" as "one of the most interesting contributions ever made to the philosophical problem of the nature of thought" (p. 80).

Kenny's second chapter, on Aquinas's metaphysics, is not so markedly critical as his summary of it (quoted above) or his introduction to it (p. 32) suggest. In fact most of it consists of an admirably clear, often favorable, exposition of notions basic to the Aristotelian-Thomistic system, and the really critical material is concentrated in a discussion of Aquinas's distinction between essence and existence (pp. 53-60). Nevertheless, Kenny himself seems to stress the negative aspect of this chapter, the first of his two detailed discussions, in a way that sharpens the point of one reviewer's question: "but why give the reader, who's presumably new to all this, such a hard time by dismantling the complex system almost as soon as it's been unpacked and assembled?" (Anon., *Kirkus Reviews* 1980, p. 421). The situation is not nearly so bad as the question suggests, but the salvage effort really might have been better served by a different discussion in depth of a part of Aquinas's philosophy Kenny admires more than his treatment of essence and existence—his analysis of human action, for instance, or his moral philosophy.

Perhaps Kenny emphasizes his criticism of Aquinas's doctrine of being in order to further the negative side of the purpose discernible in the long passage I quoted above. For he seems to have been concerned not only to enhance Aquinas's reputation as a philosopher but also to extricate him further from "ecclesiastical circles," and it is within those circles that Aquinas's account of essence and existence has sometimes seemed to be his "most celebrated doctrine concerning *esse*" (p. 53). I agree with Kenny that the importance of this doctrine has been overemphasized (although I think his criticism of it might have been carried out more effectively and less distractingly in a different setting); he is probably not ready to agree with me that Aquinas's account of the relationship

between being and goodness deserves to be his most celebrated doctrine concerning *esse*.

My misgivings about this little book are far outweighed by my admiration of it. It is what I will recommend to any non-specialist colleague or student who wants a good, brief, philosophical introduction to Aquinas.

*The Effectiveness of Causes*, by **Dorothy Emmett**. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985. Pp. x + 136. Cloth \$34.50; paper \$14.95.

Reviewed by RICHARD E. CREEL, Ithaca College.

Emmett's *Causes* is an important contribution to analytic and speculative metaphysics, and though most of her references are to analytic philosophers, she discusses several idealist philosophers and acknowledges a large debt to the middle works of A.N. Whitehead.

The first thrust of *Causes* is to show that the Humean analysis of causation, i.e., 'event-causation,' is unsatisfactory. According to event-causation the basic constituents of reality are events that occur and perish instantaneously. Consequently, the appearance of change in an enduring object and of efficient causation between objects are illusions.

Emmett argues that memory makes it impossible for us to believe this interpretation of causation. "On the model of causation as a sequence of events, a present state succeeds a past state, and that is all there is to be said. But memory suggests there is a great deal more to be said. What has happened in the past has had real effects in making us what we are . . . " [93]. "We cannot doubt that our present life is shaped by past experiences" [91]. "Our primitive experience is of the derivation of what is going on in the present from what was going on in the immediate past" [88].

The way out of the Zeno-universe of event-causation is to start with the position that the basic constituents of reality are things, not events. Events are secondary to things, occurring because the actions of things upon one another cause transactions, impacts, operations that result in change of one sort or another, including the persistence of an object from one moment to the next.

A cause is "something on which something happening to something else depends" [87]. Emmett distinguishes two types of cause. In *transeunt causation* there is "a product apart from the activity of producing," as when one thing acts upon another. In *immanent causation* "the product is not separable from the activity producing it," as in a dance or a recollection. Transeunt causation depends upon immanent causation because the transeunt impact of one individual on another presupposes the persistence of each while the causal transaction takes